The United Opinion.

Circulation 2000.

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BRADFORD, VT., SEPT. 15, 1882.

A LITTLE COWARD.

That was what Miss Merivale had called her that morning when she trembled and turned pale because the black mare reared with her. She begged Sir Robert to take her off, and stood in ignominious safety while Agatha Merivale mounted Stella and rode off triumphantly down the avenue.

She was a coward. She did not deny it, and was sometimes very much ashamed of it. But no one had seemed to mind it, until Agatha Merivale come, with her bold, dark eyes and her dashing ways, her riding and hunting; and everybody admired Agatha so much, even Sir Robert!

She almost hated Agatha! You see, until Agatha came they had been so happy at De Rossett. Little orphan Madelaine Leigh had never been so happy in her life as here at the hall with sweet Lady de Rossett, who was her guardian, and her son, Sir Robert. They were so kind and good to her. They petted and loved her so. And now Agatha had come, and for two weeks had monopolized Sir Robert and kept the house in a turmoil of gayety, and laughed at Lina, and made her life wretched.

Lina's maid repeated that everybody said Sir Robert was to marry Miss Merivale. Lina made a stern resolve that she would run away from the hall when that event took place. Run away! She would run away now! Not far though—she was too much of a coward to venture far into the world alone; but she would go away across the fields to "Aunt Margaret's," as she called Lady de Rossett's widowed sister-in-law, who lived in a quiet, comfortable house a mile away from the hall.

Mrs. Harrington was an invalid, paralyzed and confined to her bed. She was rather a grim old lady, and most were inclined to shun her; but sweet, bright little Lina had won her way into the old lady's heart, and was always welcome at the lodge.

Yes, she would run away to Aunt Margaret's, and, perhaps, when she was missed, Sir Robert might feel a moment's uneasiness about her. Seizing her hat and a light shawl, she flew off across the park, calling Leo, Sir Robert's pretty colley to go with her. Lina did not like to cross the fields alone, being possessed by a great terror of bulls; but with Leo she would not mind it much.

Leo was calmly taking a nap on the front portico, but he started up and raced after her with a joyous bark. But at the little gate that led from the park into the field Lina was greatly disconcerted by an unexpected encounter with Sir Robert and Miss Merivale, who came laughing and talking along the path, both looking bright and handsome in the golden rays of the setting sun.

She brushed past them with a hasty "Good evening," but Sir Robert turned back to speak to her.

"Where are you going, Lina?" he asked.

"To Aunt Margaret's," she answered, not looking at him.

"Alone, Lina? Are you not afraid? If you will wait a little while I will go with you," Sir Robert said," looking down kindly at the girl's flushed cheeks and averted eyes.

"No, thanks," Lina answered, hastily. "I will not trouble you. Leo will take care of me. And you would be late for dinner if you went with me."

"May I come for you, then, after dinner?" Sir Robert asked.

"Thanks, I an not coming back. I shall stay all night," was the hurried answer, and Lina turned to go.

But Sir Robert detained her for a moment.

"Lina," he said in a low tone, "what makes you avoid me so lately? What have I done to offend you?"

Lina raised her blue eyes hastily to his, for one moment, and then dropped them again.

"I have not avoided you," she said, coldly. "You have been very much occupied with—other people. There, I will not detain you."

She waved her little hand haughtily, and walked away from him. He watched the pretty, white-robed figure for a moment, and then Leo come and fawned on him.

"Leo, Leo!" called Lina's voice.

"Go, Leo," said his master, and the obedient dog trotted off down the path after the girl.

It was rather dreary at the "Lodge" that evening. Mrs. Harrington was out of humor because her agent had failed to call that day to receive a thousand pounds that she wished him to deposit for her. And Parkins, her nurse and housemaid, let the maid servants all go off to a fair in the village, "where they will certainly get into mischief," Mrs. Harrington said.

But when Lina had talked to her and made her laugh a little, she forgot her grievances, and chatted away very pleasantly. At ten o'clock she declared she had laughed till she was tired, and Lina must give her her drops and let her go to sleep.

"There! the spoon is gone. Where can Parkins have put it! Child, would you mind running down into the pantry and bringing me a spoon? I would ring for Parkins, but she told me she wanted to get up some muslins this evening, and would come up as soon as she had finished."

Lina did not altogether like to pass down the long stairs and silent entries leading to the pantry, but she went, and Leo trotted after her. As she stood in the pantry, looking round for spoons with no light but a faint gleam from the hall lamp, a sound of low voices caught her ear.

The pantry was on the ground floor, its iron-barred shuttered window looking into the garden. The sound was outside the window, and Lina paused to listen. The first word that caught her ear startled her.

"A thousand pounds and all the old woman's jewelry and plate!" said a man's voice, in a husky undertone.

"Yes," was the reply, in a woman's voice—the voice, Lina knew, of Parkins, Mrs. Harrington's model, soft-voiced lady-like nurse—"and there wont be any trouble about it, because I have let the women go away to stay all night, and sent the gardener on a fool's errand to misses brother's, 20 miles off."

"But this girl that came to-night—what about her?" asked the man.

"Oh, she will go to her room presently, and stay there if she is wise. She'd be no hindrance anyway—a silly, timid little thing. But it's as well to let her get out of the way," said Parkins, cooly.

"But see here, Molly, why not do it now? Then we'll have time to get away before daylight," said the man.

"I tell you it is not safe before 11 o'clock," Parkins said, positively. "People may come in. Sir Robert don't like her out of his sight for long and that idiotic young Marsden may come mooning in. Wait till half-past eleven, and the west door here will be open. And, Jim, look here, when you get this swag, you are to take me with you—your wife, mind."

The voices grew fainter. Evidently the speakers were moving away from the house. But Lina had heard enough. Sick with terror, she leaned against the pantry wall a moment and tried to think. What did it all mean? Robbery, murder! And no help near. Her first instinct was to fly out of the house and across the field to the hall. But her absence would be instantly discovered, she knew, and poor Aunt Margaret would be alone with those wretches. No, she must not go—but to stand here idle would do no good. She flew like a bird along the halls and up stairs, Leo pacing by her side. At Aunt Margaret's door she paused and a sudden thought came to her. She would send Leo home for help.

"Where is the spoon, child? How long you staid. Good heavens! what is the matter?" cried the old lady, as she saw the girl's white, terrified face. Lina began some evasive answer, but instantly remembered that Aunt Margaret must be told the whole story or nothing could be done to save her. She did tell it, and Aunt Margaret listened in silent consternation, and then burst out impetuously with:—

"Good heaveus, child! Why don't you run right home?"

"Because I knew Parkins would be up here in a few minutes and find I was gone, and then—"

"Ah, well. So you stayed to save the old woman if you could. What are you doing, child? Why don't you lock the door and pile things against it? Good God! if I was just able to rise out of this bed?"

But Lina did not speak for a moment. She had found a pencil and paper and was rapidly writing a few words. When she had finished—

"Now," she said, "When Parkins comes tell her I am to sleep on her couch here in your room, and she must go somewere else. I will be back in a moment, Leo."

Out of the room she darted, and down to the hall door, which she unbarred and passed through. Then, kneeling in the shadow of a pillar on the portico, she tied the note tightly in her handkerchief round Leo's neck.

She put her arms round his neck after that, kissed his forehead, and a half sob escaped her.

"Is that you, miss?" said a smooth voice from the hall. "Why, whatever are you doing in the dark there?"

Lina sprang up as if she had been shot.

"I am sending the dog home," she said. speaking quietly though the throbs of her heart shook her whole frame. "He is restless here without his master, Go home, Leo, straight home, sir!"

The dog, with one farewell lick at her hand, bounded down the steps and vanished in the dewy darkness of the summer night.

"Oh, God! let him go safely and swiftly!" prayed the girl in her heart. Then she went in and helped Parkins bar the door, and they went together up stairs.

Aunt Margaret lay very quiet on her pillow, but with her black eyes gleaming.

"Parkins," she said steadily, as they entered, "Miss Leigh is kind enough to offer to stay here with me tonight. She will sleep on your couch, and you, my poor soul, can go and get a good night's rest in another room."

Parkins was silent for one instant, and then began a series of smooth, polite expostulations, which no one would heed, and finally the civil nurse prepared the couch for Lina, and took herself off, observing sweetly:

"If Miss Leigh will leave the door ajar, I can hear a call from this room, and will come instantly."

"Thanks, Parkins, but I hope I shall not have to call you," said Lina, speaking as sweet as Parkins herself.

Then as she glided up to the door as soon as it was closed, she turned with a face of dismay, and whispered:

"The key is gone! She took it when she was fidgeting in and out with the sheets and pillows."

"There is a bolt besides," Aunt Margaret answered.

Lina gave a sigh of relief, as she slipped the bolt into the groove, and felt that she had some little protection against the enemy.

"Now, child," Aunt Magaret said, "can you use a pistol?"

"I never touched one in my life," said the "little coward." "But if I had one now I would try."

"Very well. Take my safe-key—it is under my pillow—and unlock the safe. They are just as my husband left them a year ago, but Robert looked at them a few days ago, and said they were all right. That is it. Put one of them on the foot of the bed and if those wretches come, try, my dear, to use it. Now put the other here, by my left hand. Thank God! I can use that a little. Now, what are you doing? Oh, yes; pile up all you can against the door. There, you can't move anything else. Now come here, little girl, kneel down by me, and let's say our prayers together."

With the old lady's thin, pallid hand clasped tightly in her two cold, trembling little ones, Lina knelt down there and burying her face in the pillow tried to pray.

Her petition was not a very coherent one; it was only a wild, passionate cry for pity and help, and meantime she was listening with every nerve strained for sounds from the outside. A lamp burned in the room. On the mantle-piece a softly ticking clock marked the slow minutes. No other sound broke the stillness.

Presently a sob shook the girl's figure. She was thinking of Sir Robert and his tender care over her.

Oh, if she had only not been so wayward and proud this evening, all would have been well. He would have come for her, and they would have been safe.

But surely, he would come yet. He could not fail to find the note, and she knew he would come to save her. But yet horrible doubts came to her as to whether the note would reach him. It might be lost, or Leo might wander about and not get home until it was too late.

Too late! Lina shuddered and sobbed again as she thought what that might mean. Oh, it was hard to think of dying so helplessly, so horribly, with help so near.

The long minutes crept on, and no sound came until 11 o'clock had passed. The little clock softly chimed the half hour. Then, in a few moments, came the sound of stealing footsteps in the passage, and the knob of the door was softly turned.

Breathless silence in the room. Then a gentle tap at the door. Lina clasped Aunt Magaret's hand convulsively, and the old lady spoke.

"What is that?" she asked, steadily.

"It is me, Parkins, ma'am. Would you ask Miss Leigh if she will kindly open the door? I have the toothache and want some laudanum."

"What a devil it is!" whispered Aunt Margaret. Then aloud: "Go down stairs and get something, Parkins. I cannot trouble Miss Leigh."

Lina hoped that Parkins would urge the point a little. Anything to prolong the parley and gain time.

But a whisper in the passage followed, and then a man's voice:

"Ladies, there's no use making a row. Just open the door peacefully, and you shan't be hurt. We'll break it down if you don't.

"What do you want?" Lina asked hoping to gain a little time. A new and gruff voice answered insolently:

"You knows well enough what we wants, miss. We wants the thousand pounds and the diamonds, and we mean to have them. So don't be a fool, but just open the door peacefully or you'll be sorry."

Lina sprang to her feet and seized the pistol. A flood of color rushed to her cheek and brow. She had been insulted and threatened, and indignation overpowered terror. She went toward the door and called out, quickly and clearly:

"You're not coming in. I have sent for help, and Sir Robert and his men will be here, directly. I am armed, and if you do break down the door I will shoot you like a dog."

A moment's silence followed, then a coarse laugh, and—

"All gammon. She hadn't no one to send. Break the door down," in Parkin's voice; and heavy blows began to fall upon the door. It trembled and cracked beneath the battery. A panel broke, a man's hand was thrust in; the whole door seemed about to all when—bang! bang! came two reports from Lina's pistol, and a couple of bullets crashed through the panels, and the besiegers paused abruptly.

"Go away instantly," called the girl's clear voice, "or I will fire again."

"One more rush, mate, and we are in," yelled a gruff voice outside.

"What followed was wild tumult and confusion; the crash of breaking panels and bolts, the fall of the door and the furniture Lina had piled against it, shot after shot from Lina's pistol, a yell of pain and rage from both of them. The door was down. One of the men was in the room. Lina had fired her last shot, and, running to the bed, snatched Aunt Margaret's pistol and turned to face the enemy. Suddenly came a wild shriek from Parkins. Then a voice calling, "Lina, Lina! I am coming," and Sir Robert de Rossett hurled himself bodily upon the ruffian outside the door, prostrated him, and sprang into the room over his body. And this is what he saw: Madeline Leigh the "little coward," with blazing eyes and scarlet cheeks, and a pistol in her hand, standing unflinchingly between Aunt Margaret and a burly ruffian; and Aunt Margaret herself, who had not turned in her bed for a year, standing on her feet on the floor. Two seconds changed the aspects of affairs. After that the burglar sprawled senseless on the floor. Aunt Margaret sank back on her bed with a wild "Thank God!" and the little heroine of the scene lay in Sir Robert's arms in a dead faint.

"Oh, Robert, why didn't you come sooner?" she murmured, half an hour afterward, when she opened her eyes and met his.

"Don't you know I came as soon as I found your note?" he said. "Leo went to my room and I found him there when I left the drawing room after eleven o'clock."

"Where are those dreadful men!" Lina asked, raising her head dizzily and looking around with a shudder.

"Never mind them, dear. They were taken by the men who followed me. My brave little darling! What a heroine you are!"

Two months later, when Parkins and the men were brought to trial, Aunt Margaret walked into the witness box, and gave her testimony with grim directness and self-possession. Lina gave her's with much trembling and some tears, but she looked intensely lovely, and no one wondered that Sir Robert was going to marry her.

The crowd around the door gave her three cheers as she left the court room, walking between Sir Robert and his mother, and three more for Sir Robert, and then three more for Leo, who followed them.

And Aunt Margaret's wedding present to Lina was a thousand pounds and the diamonds that had been saved by the courage of "the little coward."

THE LARGEST STEAMBOAT IN THE WORLD.

The Old Colony Steamboat Company, operating the Fall River Line of boats, and owners of the splendid steamers that should succeed even these in size, elegance of finish, and speed. To satisfy their demands, Messrs. John Roach & sons undertook to build for them the largest and fastest steamboat in the world. Last July the hull of this monster craft was launched from the famous Chester ship-yard, and was christened, in honor of the old Bay State, the Pilgrim. The huge boat, designed and built by Constructor Faron, has a length over all of 390 feet, an extreme beam of 87 feet, and a draught of 12 feet. Her normal rate of speed is to be twenty miles an hour. Thus she is ten feet longer than the Bristol, two feet wider, one foot deeper, and is designed to travel two miles an hour faster. She is built with two iron hulls, one inside of the other, and so rigidly braced as to equal in strength a solid hull of a thickness of the space existing between the two, and capable of being driven through the ice, that sometimes obstructs Long Island Sound, as though it were card-board. The space between the hulls is divided into ninety-six, and he inner hull beneath the iron main deck into seven, watertight compartments, so that it is beyond the limits of possibility for any known form of accident to sink the vessel.

When the attempt was made to launch the Pilgrim she slid along the ways until 130 feet of her length overhung the water, and then stopped, the heat of the weather and the friction of her own moving mass having melted and dried off the tallow with which the ways were greased. For nine days she remained in this position before the efforts made to move her were successful, and serious fears were entertained that she might become strained. When, however, she was finally safely afloat, it was found that not a seam had opened, nor a butt of her wood-work started, nor did the staunch hull betray the slightest evidence of the terrible strain to which it had been so long subjected.

After being launched, the Pilgrim was towed to New York, and now lies in the East River at the foot of Ninth Street, off John Roach & Son's Morgan Iron Works, where, amid the incessant din of hundreds of hammers, and in the glare from the Pletonian fires of the vast forges, she is receiving her boilers and machinery, and having her wood-work supplied. Here she will be finished ready for service, a labor that will take five or six months to complete, and she will not make her first trip until the opening of the next summer season.

The paddle-wheels of the Pilgrim are 41 feet in diameter, and to turn them the largest shaft in the world has been constructed. The Great Eastern was originally a side-wheel steamer, but each of her wheels was driven by its own engine, so that two shafts were used, neither of which was as large as this one of the Pilgrim. This shaft was forged in two sections, each of which weighs 40 tons. The great hammer by which it was beaten into shape weighs 17,000 pounds, and driven downward by steam power, is capable of delivering a blow of 66,000 pounds' weight. After being forged, the huge piece of metal was placed in a lathe, and turned as nicely and with as great accuracy as though it were a pinion of a watch. The accuracy with which this turning must be done may be realized when it is understood how the shaft and crank-piece are fitted together. The crank is bored about an eighth of an inch less in diameter than that of the shaft, and heated until the metal expands and the bore is exactly the same size as the shaft. Then the shaft, which has been kept at a much lower temperature, is inserted. If this is done too slowly, or if from irregular turning the shaft is not perfectly true to its bearings in the crank the whole work is destroyed, and the iron must be broken up; for the hot crank-piece has already closed upon the cold shaft with such a grip that they can never again be separated.

The huge cylinder, weighing thirty-five tons, having an interior diameter of nine feet and two inches and a fourteen-foot stroke, was cast in the same foundry, and its removal from the yard and careful placing within the iron hull was a most serious undertaking, and one requiring the utmost skill and attention. It was, however, successfully accomplished, and formed a scene of such interest to our artist that he chose it as his subject of illustration. The great walking-beam of the Pilgrim, already cast and waiting to be placed in position, is twenty-nine feet long by fourteen feet and six inches across at its widest part, and weighs thirty-eight tons.

In the interior of the vessel every compartment in which fire is to be used is inclosed within iron walls, not wooden walls sheathed with iron, but solid plates of heavy boiler iron riveted together, and absolutely preventing the escape of any fire inclosed within their pretecting limits.

The fetters forming the name Pilgrim, which will be painted on the paddle-boxes, will be nearly four feet in height. Every room in this magnificent steamboat is to be furnished with small electric lights, and total cost of the Pilgrim when completed will be nearly a million and a half of dollars.